

RETURN TO SUGAR TIME continues the story of Amy Garrett and her family. We first met them in SUGAR TIME and again in BEYOND SUGAR TIME.

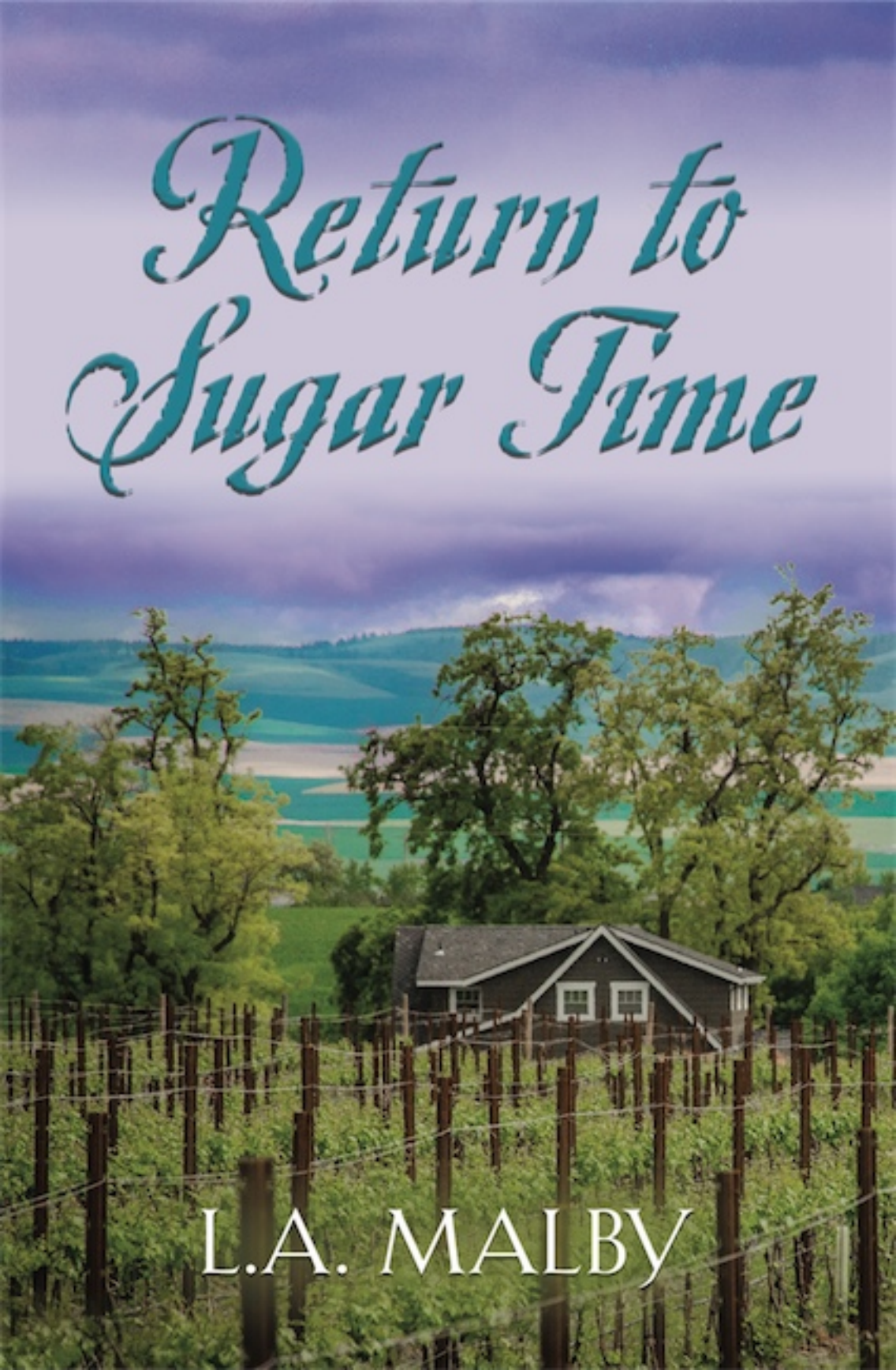
RETURN TO SUGAR TIME

by L.A. Malby

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L.A. MALBY

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Chapter 1

Amy

I rushed into the living room followed by Lindberg II, an eighty-five-pound black lab. “Harry, are you home? Where are you? You weren’t on the bus.” I glanced into the kitchen, sure he would be slathering a slice of my homemade bread with peanut butter. No Harry. I ran upstairs and knocked on his bedroom door. No answer. Twelve-year-old Harry insisted on privacy which his sisters always laughed at but honored. The upstairs had been divided into two large rooms when Harry became a first grader. Where is he?

I told him this morning I would pick him up after school following a board meeting with the Kennedy brothers. I waited around but he never showed up, so I went to his classroom. Mrs. Campbell said she hoped Harry was feeling better. Since he left for school in perfect health I told her he wasn’t sick. I couldn’t imagine him skipping school, but then I wondered.

Harry was so contented as a baby and adored by his three sisters, but he abruptly changed about two years ago. It was about the time Beth Ann left home for college. I had a sick feeling as I ran up to Magdalene’s Winery. The three-story stone mansion was home to my aunt and Leroy whom she finally agreed to marry about five years ago. I suspected my beautiful aunt decided it was time to become more respectable. Leroy’s winery business and my Molly Mae Farm were huge successes.

“Well, come on in, Amy. Where have you been keeping yourself? I haven’t seen you since we had dinner on Sunday,” Aunt Magdalene

said, looking up from her sewing machine. Lindberg II whined at the door.

“Have you seen Harry? I went to school to pick him up and found out he wasn’t in school all day.”

“No, he hasn’t been around. I could call Leroy, but he’s in Pasco still negotiating with the family who grows those purple grapes. I can never remember the name of them, but Leroy says they are the only ones that give his River Hills red wine that unique blend. I doubt he’s seen him. How about Old Doc Weeks? Have you called him?” I shook my head. My aunt phoned the sheriff who said he would meet me in about an hour as one of his new deputies required help with a belligerent shoplifter.

We spent the next hour telephoning Harry’s friends. None of them had seen him. Raymond March said Harry called him yesterday. Although he was a few years older, he always looked after my son. When I demanded to know what they talked about, Raymond hesitated.

“Uh... well... I guess he wanted to say goodbye.”

“What do you mean, he wanted to say goodbye? Where was he going?” I couldn’t believe what I was hearing.

“Aunt Amy, I don’t know. Since Christmas he’s been talking a lot about going to look for his father. I just don’t know. Uh... did you know my dad is back?” Without answering, I hung up the phone and told Aunt Magdalene I was going back to my house to wait for the sheriff.

Aunt Magdalene walked with me part way down the path, stopped, and gave me a hug. “We’ll find him, Amy, honey. We’ll find him.”

I said a quick goodbye and continued to my house. As I walked into my kitchen I heard knocking, so I hurried to the front door and, as I expected, it was Sheriff McWarren. I invited him into the oversized living room and offered him a seat on the sofa. When he was settled he asked where I thought Harry might have gone. I told him what

Raymond March said. He nodded his head. "I'll ask around. He's twelve, you said? A kid like that is probably hitchhiking. Does he have any relatives nearby?"

"No," I replied emphatically.

The sheriff didn't need to know that Harry's mother was re-married and lived near Chicago. She sent me a clipping of her wedding years ago and other than that, I hadn't heard from her since Harry was left on my couch. I remembered the early years raising Harry. My fears that his mother would show up and demand him back haunted me. Then I would get out the letter Harriet left and read it again and again: *"I give you my son, Harold Wallace Oglethorpe, to raise as yours. I will make no further claims on him. I hope you will tell him about me some day."*

Sheriff McWarren put his hand on the arm of the sofa and pushed himself up. He hitched up his pants, settled the huge revolver on his hip and then patted my shoulder. "Call your folks."

I told him I called them immediately when I realized Harry was missing. My mother was up at Aunt Magdalene's. The sisters were closer since Magdalene's marriage. My father was driving around searching for his grandson. Old Doc Weeks arrived as the sheriff was leaving. Lindberg II was delighted to see the elderly man.

"Amy, I've been worried about Harry since he read that book about the servicemen who never returned from WWII. He didn't realize the author was discussing all those who went AWOL. To him his father was a hero." Old Doc Weeks shook his head. "I should have told you, but I thought Harry would give it up. You know how kids are."

"Well, what are you saying? Did he go to find his father?"

"That's what I'm afraid of." He sipped from the bottle of home brew I handed him. "I wonder if his teacher noticed a change in him."

I shook my head. "Mrs. Campbell only tells me what a good student he is. She says he's nearly as intelligent as Beth Ann. She was horrified when I told her he wasn't home sick today."

I longed for my friend, Mary Francis March. She taught my girls and I had looked forward to Harry being her student. However, she died about three years ago from breast cancer. I knew she would have noticed a change in Harry. The March family loved him as much as his siblings and my family.

“Old Doc Weeks, what am I going to do?”

“Well, we don’t have Rob around to do the detective work for us. Have you heard from him lately?”

“He called a couple of weeks ago. We’re still friends.”

“I’ll always be sorry you guys didn’t work out, Amy,” Old Doc Weeks said, patting my arm.

“Well, so am I, but Harry is what I’m concerned about right now. I’ve got to find him.”

I hugged my old friend as he left saying he would do some looking around. “I thought Joe was still in Korea, but I heard he is back. He might have some suggestions.” I waved as Old Doc Weeks pulled himself into his ancient pickup and drove through the row of fruit trees planted so many years ago by the Kennedy brothers.

I went into my bedroom. I pulled out the top drawer in my dresser and opened a box of keepsakes. I glanced at a yellowed letter written by Rob when he was in France during the war. I put it down and continued to search. I found a packet of news clippings and letters. I had devoted many hours in my search for my missing husband. I learned that legally I wasn’t his wife as he was still married when we made our vows. Where was his watch? I dumped the box upside down. It was gone. I then noticed some of the clippings were not in order. Had Harry found them?

My thoughts were interrupted by my mother’s voice. “Amy, honey. Where are you? Maddie wants you to come and eat. Your dad is back, and Joe March just arrived.”

I returned the papers to the box and closed the drawer. I was looking forward to seeing Joe. We spent hours together in Mary Francis' hospital room. I was with Joe the night she died. I held him as we wept. Joe and I were more than friends, but I kept him at a distance. I knew Joe felt guilty about his feelings for me when he and Mary Francis were married. I recalled his words one dark night, *"I wish I'd met you years ago. Maybe it's the times. They're unsettled. Insecure."* Then he said later, *"I'm going to love you from a distance. I'm married, and a couple has to remain committed."* I left my bedroom, joined mother and we walked up the hill to Magdalene's Winery.

Chapter 2

Shirley Temple

The young woman, her light brown hair straight and hanging to her shoulders, ended Beethoven's Fifth Movement with the flourish and confidence of an accomplished pianist. Shirley Temple stood and bowed to the applauding audience. She took several more bows before the audience quieted.

Leaving the stage, she saw a young man watching her near the curtain. He smiled at her and asked, "Got time for coffee?"

He was in a couple of her classes and played the violin. He had asked her out a couple of times, but she turned him down. She had no interest or time for the opposite sex. At least she told herself that. "No way," she replied. She brushed by him, ran into the dressing room, grabbed her purse, and left the auditorium.

Julliard had several impressive auditoriums, but she preferred this one as it was near her apartment. She rushed up the stairs, unlocked the door and dashed into a room that was living room and kitchen combined. There was a door across the room that led into a bedroom. Down the hall was a bathroom that she shared with two other tenants.

"I'm so relieved that's over," Shirley said aloud. "I'll be so glad when this term is done. What am I doing here anyway?" She grabbed a Coca Cola from the small refrigerator and plopped on the couch that was in the middle of the room, placed there almost as an afterthought. She was in her second term and working toward a degree in music. She felt pressure from everyone. It was strange, but the only person who had ever asked her what she wanted to do was Rob Weeks. Mother Amy assumed music was her choice. Well, maybe it was, but what

Shirley desired to do deep in her heart was to teach disadvantaged children. She wanted to guide them, give them a better life.

Maybe it came too easy to her. She was awarded a four-year scholarship after she auditioned at Julliard. She was hundreds of miles from home. Three days by train. Rob Weeks suggested she fly next time and Shirley was thinking of it. Her good friend Sgt. Weeks. She blushed, remembering all the times she called Colonel Rob Weeks, Sergeant. She believed for years he would become her step-father. She hadn't a clue about what happened between Rob and Amy. She wondered if it was because Amy's husband was missing somewhere in Alaska. She also knew if her foster mother ever located him and got a divorce; Grandmother O'Brien would have a fit. Grandmother O'Brien was a strict Catholic and believed following all the rules would get her into heaven. Shirley knew her grandmother was relieved when Aunt Mad and Uncle Leroy were finally married.

The phone rang and shattered her thoughts. "Why Mother Amy, what a nice surprise! What? No, I haven't heard from Harry recently. He wrote me maybe a month ago. Something about did I think he was too young to travel on a ferry by himself." She laughed. "He's missing? Oh, no! Well, where did he go?" They talked a few more minutes. Shirley wanted to take the next train home, but Mother Amy gave her an empathic no. Shirley promised if she heard from Harry she would call home immediately and hung up the phone.

Shirley paced the room restlessly for a while, then put on her coat and left to stroll in the park near a small café that was open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. When she was near the café, she realized she was starving so she walked in and went to a nearby booth. A few minutes after placing her order, she heard a familiar voice, "Do you mind if I join you?"

Shirley looked toward Abel Logen,, the smiling young man who had waited at the curtain for her after her performance. He didn't wait for an invitation as he sat down across from her. "Hey, all I wanted was to take you out for a coffee. Your performance was stupendous." He smiled again.

“Abel, I told you I don’t date. I only study. The more I study the sooner I can graduate and get started on what I really want to do.” Shirley nodded her head in thanks to the chubby girl who placed her tea and biscuit in front of her. Abel quickly placed an order for himself.

“Having a cup of coffee is a not date,” Abel said. “I happen to be attracted to you, no doubt about that. Can’t you give me a chance?”

“It’s never going to happen.”

“What’s with you? You’re beautiful. You’re brilliant. Why the dark cloud hanging over you?”

Shirley sipped her coffee and studied him over the rim. “Well, if you must know, I had enough of the man, woman thing when I was a kid. I watched my mother deteriorate; cried when my dad ignored me; then my mother abandoned the two of us. The first time I don’t remember. The next few times I was old enough to know she was gone. If it weren’t for Amy Garrett who took me in and raised me as her daughter, I doubt I would be sitting here today telling you why I won’t date you, or anyone for that matter.”

“Well, I’m sorry, Shirley. How about this? Someone, I assume my mother, left me on the doorstep of St. Benedict’s Orphanage when I was several hours old.” Abel nodded at the waitress as she placed a chocolate sundae in front of him. He picked up a spoon and began to eat.

“My dear God! I had no idea.” They looked at each other and began laughing. “Who would have thought,” Shirley sputtered, “that out of all the thousands of students at Julliard, I would meet the one who can top my story. Except,” her eyes gleamed, “I can do you one better.”

“Betcha can’t.”

Shirley told Abel the story of how her brother, Harry, came to live with them on Molly Mae’s farm. “A few days before Christmas when the war was still going on, Harriet Oglethorpe left her baby with Mother Amy. She asked my mother to raise her son. Harriet had lived

with Wally Garrett, Mother Amy's husband. She packed up their baby and ran off and left Wally somewhere in Alaska. She was from the Aleutian Islands and had been interred near Ketchikan with her mother and grandparents. Anyway, to make a long story short, Harriet left, and little Harry joined our family."

"I think we were meant to be," Abel said.

Shirley looked at him. She had to admit he had the most expressive eyes. She could see into his soul. His dark brown hair was almost black, and he needed a haircut. If he were clean shaven he might pass for a movie star.

"Here's something else about me," Abel said, winking at her. "I was adopted when I was about six months old. My adoptive parents had six girls and they wanted a boy. I became the chosen one. I can do no wrong. They consider me their blessing in life." He sat back, looking every bit the part of royalty.

"I was the chosen one of a dog," Shirley said, a look of pain flashing through her huge brown eyes. Abel took her hand across the table. "He was a big black Labrador and he was named Lindberg. He loved me. He always knew when something was hurting me. He wasn't all that old when he died." She turned away and removed her hand from his. "You know, I found him dead one morning up by the barn. It was like he collapsed. I cried more for him than I ever did for my mother when she died."

"Yeah, you win. You topped my stories."

Shirley blinked and swallowed her tears. "What movies do you like?" she asked.

"Anything you do," he replied. "Anything at all as long as I can go with you. You want some?" he asked, holding out his spoon dripping with chocolate sundaes.

Shirley shook her head. "Actually, there's some more to the story about Harry. He's missing. Mother Amy is scared to death. She thinks

he ran off to find his father, the missing Wally, and I think she may be right. Harry wrote and asked me if I thought he was too young to get a ride on a ferry. I didn't tell Mother Amy, but when I answered his letter I told him he always acted like he was twelve going on thirty, so go for it. I thought he was kidding. I wish I could go home and be there with Mother Amy. My two sisters are away."

Smiling, Abel said, "Stay here, Shirley Temple. I love your name. Maybe I can help you figure out how to find Harry."

For the first time in months Shirley felt a warmth steal over her. Maybe, just maybe, she could learn to trust. Perhaps Aunt Maddie was right when she told her the day would come when she was free from her childhood. Returning his smile, she reached out and took Abel's hand.

Chapter 3

Sissy

Sister Mary Theresa (once known as Sissy Garrett) reminded herself to fold her hands into her long flowing black sleeves and keep her eyes down as she left the chapel. “Sister, Mother Lawrence of Jesus wants to see you in her office,” a tall, forbidding, pockmarked nun ordered. Sister Mary Theresa obediently turned away from the dining hall and made her way to the imposing door at the end of the hall. She sighed. What rule had she managed to break now?

She tapped on the door and entered when a commanding voice told her she may do so. She knelt as Mother Lawrence of Jesus held out her hand with the large ruby ring and Sister Mary Theresa kissed it. “You may sit.” Sissy did so as her stomach rumbled. She hoped this wouldn’t take long, she was starving, and pancakes were always served on Wednesdays. “Your mother called.”

“Yes, Mother,” Sissy said. She attempted to look indifferent and smoothed down the sudden burst of excitement.

“Did you do as I ordered and request your mother to not telephone and, more importantly, not refer to you as Sissy? I inferred disrespect in your mother’s attitude.”

Sissy squirmed in her seat. She hadn’t told her mother about Mother Lawrence of Jesus’ request. She swallowed the lump in her throat. She missed her mother with a passion. If only her sister, Beth Ann, was here or her dearest friend and foster sister, Shirley Temple. She sighed. “I’m sorry, Mother Lawrence of Jesus. I forgot to tell my mother. I don’t think she would have called unless it was important. Do you know why?” Sissy felt anxious. Something must be going on.

“No, and I didn’t ask. Your mother mumbled something about Harry. I informed her that my young nuns were not allowed to speak on a telephone and requested she write if she wished to communicate with you. When I told her, she must call you by your religious name, Sister Mary Theresa, she laughed disrespectfully. I was appalled by her lack of reverence.” Sissy sighed. She knew her mother.

There was a knock at the door. Mother Lawrence of Jesus frowned at the interruption. “Yes?” she barked.

“Excuse me, but a telegram arrived for Sister Mary Theresa. I knew she was with you, so I brought it here.” The elderly nun handed the telegram to Mother Lawrence of Jesus and quickly left.

Mother Lawrence of Jesus read the telegram. She frowned, and as she read it again the frown deepened, and she shook her head. “I don’t know what possesses your mother. I asked her to write you a letter, but instead she disrupts our lives with this.” She shook the telegram at Sissy.

“Please Mother Lawrence of Jesus, what does she say? It must be important. And, if I may point out, my mother did do as you asked. She wrote instead of calling on the telephone.” Too late, Sissy realized she had corrected her superior.

“It’s not the message, Sister Mary Theresa. It’s the use of the name, Sissy. Your mother has shown complete lack of respect and reverence for your vocation in life and shames our convent. I won’t have it!” She crumpled the telegram and threw it toward the waste basket. “You are dismissed. and I suggest you make an extra visit to the chapel and pray for divine guidance for your mother and also spend time in reflection on the practice of humility and acceptance that we are now your family.” She glared at Sister Mary Theresa as she stood and turned to leave. Sister Mary Theresa wanted to slam the door. What was wrong at home?

Sister Cecelia Mary, a dear nun crippled with arthritis in her spine, bent over the griddle and served Sissy three hotcakes. “Here you go my

dear. You need some sustenance after a visit with our Mother Lawrence of Jesus.”

Sissy smiled gratefully and sat at the small kitchen table. The old cook also set a plate down with two perfectly poached eggs. Sissy ate hurriedly. She put her plates in the sink, looked around, and then hugged Sister Cecelia Mary before hurrying to her third-grade classroom.

Thirty-seven eight-year-old students, the girls dressed in blue jumpers with white blouses, the boys in white shirts with black pants, stood as she entered. “Good morning, Sister,” they chanted. Sissy smiled. She led them in a Hail Mary and the flag salute. They all sat down. and their day began.

Sissy was distracted the entire morning. When she released them for recess, she hurried down the hall. Since this was Wednesday she knew Mother Lawrence of Jesus was in the kitchen consulting with Sister Cecelia Mary on the menus for the week. Sissy stopped at the office door, turned the door knob, and slowly pushed it open enough to peer into the room. Relieved, she saw it was empty. She looked down the silent hall; then tiptoed into the room and ran to the waste basket. The telegram was still there. She grabbed it and scurried from the room, almost bumping into a nun.

“Were you looking for Mother Lawrence of Jesus?” the secretary, Sister Dominica, asked.

“I thought I left my lesson plans when I met with Mother Lawrence of Jesus earlier,” Sissy lied. Since all the teachers were required to have their plans approved, she prayed her explanation would be believed. The telegram burned inside her sleeve.

Sissy went back to her classroom. She was supposed to be in the chapel about now ruminating on her need for humility and divine guidance. She looked out the window at the mountains. She longed for the grape vines and the hops that grew with abundance on Molly Mae Farm. Tears formed in her eyes and she blinked rapidly. She had made the mistake of a lifetime when she became a nun. She hated it here and

she hated Mother Lawrence of Jesus. She pulled the telegram from her sleeve.

Sissy, darling. Harry has disappeared. I think he's gone to find his father. If you hear anything from him make the dragon lady let you call me. I love you. Mother.

She had to laugh. No wonder Mother Lawrence of Jesus had thrown the telegram away! How Sissy loved her mother who always marched to her own drummer.

Later, as the class was preparing to practice for the huge holiday program, Sister Francis Mary entered. "Mother Lawrence of Jesus requires your presence in her office," she said. "I'm to take over for you."

Sissy swallowed. Would she be sent home in disgrace? She hurried down the hall feeling a little excited by the possibility. Her grandmother O'Brien would be disappointed in her, but Sissy knew her mother would welcome her with open arms, as would Aunt Magdalene. She tapped on the door and stuck her head in. "Yes, Mother Lawrence of Jesus?" she smiled.

"Sit," Mother Lawrence of Jesus said, pointing at the chair. Sissy sat. "You are being posted to our mission in Fort Feather. You will be replacing the third-grade teacher. Pack your bags, the train leaves in an hour. Here is your ticket. That is all."

"Thank you, Mother Lawrence of Jesus." Sissy stood, holding her head high. If Mother Lawrence of Jesus thought she would plead to not be sent to what all the nuns referred to as the outer Siberia of the order of the Sisters of All Charity, well, she'd not seen a Garrett in action. The only deviation from that was Sissy gave the office door a slam. She hurried to her tiny room and quickly packed her bag, remembering her violin. She left through the front door where the janitor waited to drive her to the station in a battered old pickup.

As soon as the janitor dropped her off at the train station, Sissy made her way to a phone booth and placed a collect call to Molly Mae

SUGAR TIME RETURNS

Farm. “Mom? It’s Sissy. The last I heard from Harry he said he wondered what it would cost to travel to Alaska. I thought he was simply joking.”

Chapter 4

Beth Ann

The packed bar filled with an enthusiastic crowd sat enthralled as Beth Ann Garrett, a striking young woman with curly blonde hair looked over to the guitar player; nodded her head and struck the perfect ending note to *The Yellow Rose of Texas*. She walked off the stage as Sean Macadoo, the lead guitar and leader of their group, announced an intermission. Beth Ann sat in a nearby booth and drew a deep breath. This was what gave her life. Singing before an audience. She'd been doing it since she was nine years old. Would her mother be proud of her daughter singing in a tavern? Beth Ann knew she was expected to put her studies first, but at the same time, she knew her mother would be the first one in the audience to applaud her.

She was the genius child. She graduated from high school at sixteen and enrolled at Barnard, a college for women. Her grandmother O'Brien wanted her to attend Julliard with Shirley Temple, but Beth Ann turned down a music education. However, she loved to sing and took lessons after her classes for the day. The plan was for her to get a master's degree in creative writing. She also loved to write, a talent she shared with her older sibling, Sissy. Their mother was the author of five books. The last two had done well and Beth Ann knew her mother was delighted that her daughter was following in her footsteps. Well, perhaps Sissy would be able to do the writing if that was allowed for a nun and let Beth Ann get on with her singing.

That was the problem. Beth Ann loved to write, but her passion was to sing. To perform. She thought her mother of all people would understand. After all, she had entertained the troops singing during WWII. Beth overheard her mother and Aunt Magdalene laughing about

how her mother sang her way to Alaska when she went searching for Wally, her AWOL husband and the father of her two girls, Sissy and Beth Ann. When Amy arrived in Ketchikan she sang in a bar. Later, back home, she continued to correspond with a prostitute who had worked at the place, Dynamite's Beer and Concert Hall.

If she dropped out of college, the money wouldn't be great, but Beth Ann could survive on it. Sean wanted her to tour with them. He had gigs lined up in five places in New York, but the greatest was a concert in Florida during spring break. They would have four performances with ten other bands. A winner would be chosen to appear on the Ed Sullivan TV program. Sean was excited, and he knew they could name their price if they won.

"So, what do you think, Bethie?" Sean asked, sliding into the cushioned seat across from her. He was glassy eyed. Beth never asked him what he smoked during intermission. "The Ed Sullivan show is the most watched TV program out there. My grandmother never misses it. At eight o'clock Sunday evening there she is in front of the television. Don't bother to telephone her, because she won't answer."

Beth Ann nodded her head. The same was true for her mother and everyone else she knew. "You know I can handle the gigs around New York, but I can't fathom how I can get to Florida during spring break. It's insurmountable for me."

"I love the way you talk," he laughed. "Hey, we're going in a bus."

"Me and a bunch of guys? No way."

"Sally will travel with us and I think I can get my grandmother to come. We'll need her to babysit Sean Junior. She can be your chaperone." He drew the word out. He often made fun of her. "Come on, want something to drink?" She shook her head. "Think about it, Bethie. You are the greatest singer out there. You are. You know you are. You'll be famous. Isn't that what you want... to make records? You can always do college later. People are taking advantage of you. All they see are your brains. Well, let me tell you, what I see is one gorgeous babe with a powerful voice."

Beth Ann listened. After all, Sean was older, and he was wise. He had been married to Sally for five years, they celebrated his 27th birthday last week. He wrote music and was working on a song for her. "I'll think about it, Sean," Beth said as they returned for their final performance.

"You do that, Bethie. We win that Ed Sullivan contest and we can name our price. You'll be famous."

It was late, and Beth Ann waited anxiously at the door of her dormitory. The click of the lock sounded, and her roommate and a prefect stood in the opening. They hurried silently up the three flights of stairs to their room at the end of a long hall. "You smell of cigarettes," Laurie Better sniffed.

"Oh, dear," Beth Ann replied. "I better air out this dress." She opened the window and hung it on a nail the two of them had placed there. "I'm exhausted. We have another gig tomorrow night. I need to rehearse in the afternoon. Do you want to come? It's Saturday so I can get a late-night pass, can't I?"

"Oh, Beth Ann, you goose, no way. One pm at the latest. But yes, I'll come. That dreamy guy I met at the mixer last week called me. I'll bring him."

Beth Ann was up early. As she walked past the desk in the reception area the prefect on duty called to her, "Hey Bethie, phone call for you. I was just about to send someone up to get you."

Beth Ann thought it was probably Sean calling about tonight. She walked to the phone booth, shut the door, and picked up the receiver. "Oh, Mother, you surprised me. What's going on?" She listened to her mother explain about Harry and drew a deep breath. "I don't believe it. Why would he do that? He always talked about the Aleutian Islands, but you know it was just talk." Beth Ann could hear someone in the background. It sounded like Old Doc Weeks. "I heard from Harry maybe a week or so ago. Wait a minute, let me think." She leaned against the phone booth window. "Mother, are you still there? He

wanted to know how far Alaska was from Jupiter. I guess I thought he was writing a school paper or something.”

Old Doc Weeks got on the phone. “Listen little Bethie.” She smiled. Oh, how she loved the dear old man. “Harry has probably run off. Sheriff McWarren says someone matching his description boarded a train in Pasco although the ticket master doesn’t recall him purchasing a ticket. There’s been no sign of him after that.”

Beth Ann said, “No, he would take a bus. I’m sure that’s what he’d do. Remember? Ever since he went on that bus ride to Portland with Raymond March last year he couldn’t stop talking about it. If he’s headed to Alaska, ask Mother where he can board a ferry. That’s where he will be heading to.” They spoke a few more minutes. Her mother got back on the phone and asked how she was doing in school. Beth Ann wanted to tell her about the band and her opportunity, but she decided her mother had enough to deal with. She hung up after assuring her mother she would let her know the instant she heard anything from Harry.

Beth Ann waved to the prefect as she left the dorm. She wandered down a path that took her through beautiful grounds. Soon she was sitting next to the lake that bordered the college. She had a couple of papers to write before Monday and an essay on the meaning of life. What a joke. She could write all of them in an hour.

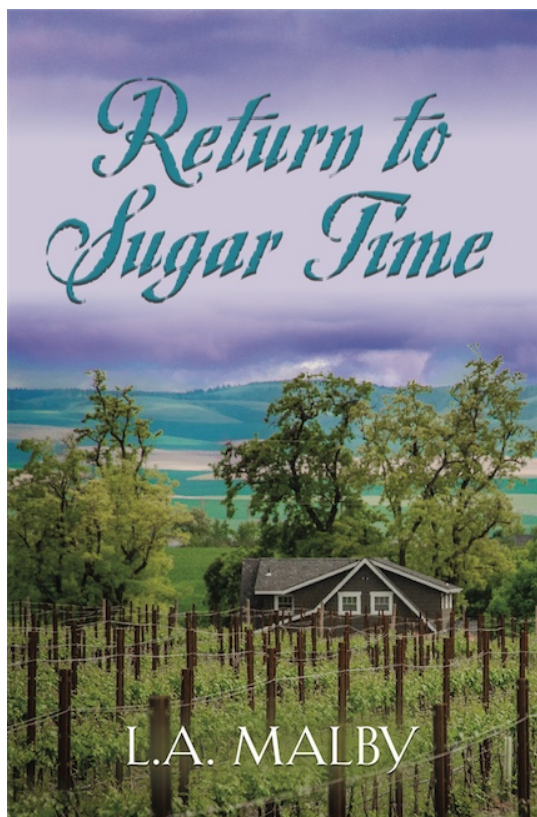
Beth Ann had no idea why it was so difficult for her to confide in her mother. Amy Mary Theresa O’Brien Garrett was possibly the one person in the universe who was unflappable, unshakable. Beth Ann knew she had no idea of all her mother’s adventures, but Uncle Joe hinted of them. Why then, could she not tell her mother she planned to drop out of Barnard and travel with Sean and his band? She could hear it now, “By the way, Mother, I’m going to be on the road for a while. I’m singing with *Sean and the Fifties*.”

As long as she could remember Beth Ann dispensed advice to her family. They often turned to her for help. But still, she kept her personal problems to herself. She smiled and thought back to her First

Communion. Why had she not told her mother she gave her patent leather white shoes away to her friend who had nothing? They had been a Christmas gift to Beth Ann. Her mother discovered her crying on her bed shortly before they were to leave for the church. So, what did her mother do? She stood Beth Ann in front of a mirror and told her how beautiful she was inside and out. She also said her brown school shoes looked great. Beth Ann could smile now, but it was devastating when she was nine years old.

She knew Sissy would probably quote some biblical passage about not using her God given brains for something more powerful than singing in a band. On the other hand, Sister Mary Theresa was more subdued these days. Beth Ann wasn't all too sure she liked the new Sissy. Shirley Temple always had more than her share of problems so none of them ever wanted to burden the quiet and serious girl who came to live with them when she was a child.

Beth Ann took a city bus to *Al's*, the club where she sang last night. She knocked on the back door and it was opened by the drummer, Sam. They rehearsed for the next two hours. She decided if her brother had the courage to search for a parent, then she would find some bravery too. Before she left, Beth Ann approached Sean. "I'm in, Sean," she said. "I'm going on tour with you."



RETURN TO SUGAR TIME continues the story of Amy Garrett and her family. We first met them in SUGAR TIME and again in BEYOND SUGAR TIME.

RETURN TO SUGAR TIME

by L.A. Malby

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